

Statement by John P. Walters
Director of National Drug Control Policy
Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
“The Problems Facing Native Youth”
August 1, 2002

Chairman Inouye, Ranking member Campbell and distinguished members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to discuss the Native American ad portion of our National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign (“Campaign”). I appreciate the interest the Committee has shown in this effort and welcome the opportunity to discuss the Campaign’s important work in this area.

I will focus my oral remarks on the Native American ads and respectfully request that my entire written statement be submitted for the record.

I. Assessing the Extent of the Drug Problem Facing American Indian Youth

It was only recently that our nation began to closely examine the immense substance abuse problem that has been plaguing Indian Country for generations. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) ground breaking 1998 report: *Prevalence of Substance Abuse Among Racial and Ethnic Subgroups in the United States, 1991-1993*, significantly changed what we knew about drug use among American Indians. It was the first report that actually gave national estimates of illicit drug use, alcohol abuse and dependence and treatment gap information for previously under researched racial and ethnic communities.

The findings of the SAMHSA report were dismal--American Indians had an overall rate of past-year illicit drug use that was 60% higher than the general population. Almost ten years later, this disparity remains. According to the 2000 National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (NHSDA), 19.8 percent of American Indians reported using illicit drugs in the past year, compared to 11.0 percent of the total U.S. population. The rate of past thirty-day use of any illicit drug is twice that of the total U.S. population-12.6 per cent compared to 6.3 per cent, respectively.

The pattern of drug use is even more alarming with American Indian youth. According to the 1999 NHSDA (no data were available for 2000¹), 46.5 percent of American Indian youth (ages 12-17) reported ever using an illicit drug, with 30.5 percent of youth professing to use in the past year, and 20.0 percent in the past month. This is substantially higher than the prevalence for the general population whose prevalence rates are respectively 27.6 percent, 19.8 percent and 9.8 percent for the same time period. These findings are congruent with the scientific literature that has long observed that American Indian youth begin using an array of substances (oftentimes inhalants and alcohol) at an earlier age and are more likely to try marijuana than their

¹ While data were collected in 2000 for American Indian Youth, these specific estimates were not reported due to low precision, i.e., the sample size was too small.

white counterparts. Consequently drug and alcohol dependency rates are typically higher among American Indians than in the general population. The attached four charts illustrate the findings.

While drug use is a problem that touches every racial and ethnic community in our nation, drug use in the American Indian community has remained at unacceptably high levels for too long. For a number of socio-psychological reasons, drugs and alcohol have become a fixture in many American Indian communities, negatively impacting the crime rate, health outcomes and the family cohesiveness. This threatens to destroy the very thing that American Indians have fought so hard to keep intact, their culture.

Recognizing this threat, ONDCP has made a concerted effort to combat it. In February, I traveled to Phoenix and met with twenty-one tribal leaders from across the Southwest. At this meeting we exchanged ideas and I left with a sense of urgency for the need to address the problem. In May, I traveled to Los Angeles where we unveiled the Native American portion of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign at the city's Native American Community Health Center. This coming September, I will be traveling to Billings, Montana, where I will meet with tribal leaders from across the country as we participate in the White Bison Circles of Recovery Conference. The purpose of the conference is to focus attention on the problem of substance abuse and mobilize Native American communities to combat it from within. I believe targeted outreach such as this will help us to push back against this scourge.

II. The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign: Empowering American Indian Youth to Reject Illicit Drugs.

The National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign is a comprehensive public health communications campaign designed to prevent and reduce youth illicit drug use. The Campaign uses multi-media advertising and public communications strategies to promote anti-drug attitudes and behavior. This national effort integrates paid advertising at national and local levels with public information outreach through a network of private and public partnerships. Unlike most consumer marketing campaigns that are directed toward Americans with specific economic characteristics, the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign attempts to reach ALL youth and their parents, particularly those who are at risk for drug abuse. It is one of the cornerstones of the President's *National Drug Control Strategy* as it makes a significant contribution toward our goal of stopping drug use before it starts.

The Campaign is particularly relevant to today's discussion on American Indian youth because of its considerable multicultural outreach efforts. For each of the past three years, the Campaign has delivered more than \$30 million worth of drug prevention messages that are tailor-made to reach the country's African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian and Hispanic communities. These figures are in addition to the messages these audiences receive through the general market media. The Campaign is one of the federal government's largest multicultural communications efforts, rivaling that of the most extensive corporate efforts. The Media Campaign's multicultural efforts are unique for several reasons:

- Creative messages are based on scientific research and are reviewed by a Behavioral Change Expert Panel composed of scientists from ethnically diverse backgrounds with experience developing social marketing communications for ethnic audiences.
- Multicultural advertising is developed on a largely pro bono basis by minority-owned agencies that specialize in creating ethnic advertising.
- Multicultural anti-drug messages are delivered in eight languages: English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Tagalog, Korean, Vietnamese, and Cambodian.
- Creative ideas and advertising are tested with age and culturally specific audiences prior to airing to ensure that messages are culturally competent and resonate with viewers.
- Strategic anti-drug partnerships and drug prevention programs are developed with community and educational organizations serving multicultural youth, parents, and other influential adults to extend the national advertising themes to the local level.

The Media Campaign has invested more than \$5 million in designing, developing, and placing the federal government's first-ever anti-drug television, radio and print advertising, specifically tailored to reach American Indian elders, parents and youth. These ads reflect the culmination of two years of research to gain a detailed understanding of the pro- and anti-drug attitudes among American Indian youth and adults, and to gain cultural insights that would aid in the development of anti-drug messages and community outreach efforts. Beginning in the spring of 2000, the Campaign conducted 46 focus groups in urban and rural venues in: Phoenix, Arizona; Fairbanks, Alaska; Billings, Montana; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Seattle, Washington; Pierre, South Dakota; and Albuquerque, New Mexico. Over 400 teens, parents and elders from more than 32 tribes participated in the discussions, providing pivotal insights for the Campaign. Some of the comments from the focus groups were:

- *American Indian youth and parents define themselves as living dual existences. While they feel they can identify and participate in mainstream culture, they also take pride in their native culture. They view their heritage as distinct, something that is honored and respected.*
- *Many parents are aware their children are being raised in a world different from the one they inhabited when they were young. They acknowledge that their kids face problems specific to growing up American Indian, including increased exposure to drug and alcohol abuse, racism and violence, and are unsure of how to parent effectively without the guidance of traditional ways.*
- *American Indians spoke of the negative portrayals of their people in the general media, some of which is unintended. They felt these misrepresentations in popular culture stigmatize them as a community and strongly suggested that any anti-drug advertising depict communities and families in a positive light. (Such insight became the foundation for the Campaign's first ever television ads for American Indians).*
- *Even with all these challenges, most kids feel optimistic. They believe they have more opportunities than their parents and are thinking about their futures. Many believe that urban life offers more opportunity, but most see time spent on the reservation as a source of strength, connection and community.*

- *American Indian youth emphasize the importance of the role that elders play in their lives. Grandparents are especially important, as they often are responsible for passing on culture (language, stories, cooking, hunting, fishing, ceremonies) and for some, provide safety, security and continuity if parents are dealing with their own substance abuse issues.*

Based on this research, the Media Campaign developed a communications strategy that would guide the creation of American Indian parent and youth advertising. The first round of work reflecting this new strategy was developed and launched in July of 2000. It consisted of two youth-targeted radio advertisements titled, “Once We Had” and “Respect,” and two parent/adult-targeted print ads titled, “The Warrior,” and “Girls.” This spring, the Media Campaign completed production of its second round of American Indian advertising for American Indian/Alaskan Native youth, parents, and elders. Also grounded in the Campaign’s on-going research, the new advertising consists of print, radio and two television executions titled “The Promise” and “Adventure” which are currently running in television markets with a large American Indian viewership, and also in American Indian publications and American Indian radio stations. The new messages even more than before, pay homage to traditional cultures and values, while modeling healthy anti-drug attitudes and behaviors.

The television advertising has been so well received that the Media Campaign is considering airing the new television advertising nationally. To gauge its value with the general population, the Campaign conducted several focus groups with general market youth and parents to solicit their responses. Both audiences responded positively to the advertising, in part because of its “cultural” casting and its universal anti-drug messaging.

Additionally, the Campaign has developed partnerships with a number of government agencies and organizations that have on-going contact with American Indians and Alaskan Natives. ONDCP has collaborated with members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Congress of American Indians, the Indian Health Service, the United National Indian Tribal Youth, the National Indian Education Association and the Indian School Board Association. The Campaign continues to develop innovative ideas to amplify our anti-drug messages throughout the American Indian population. The Campaign is currently producing anti-drug posters and other resources specifically for American Indian youth and teens, and is looking to work closely with BIA funded public schools and boarding schools to develop culturally relevant anti-drug curricula. The Campaign also continues to have a presence at national conferences for American Indian youth, tribal elders and prevention programs.

III. The Importance of Multicultural Outreach.

ONDCP is very pleased with the body of work that the Media Campaign’s American Indian outreach initiative has produced. The work is a reflection of the countless hours my staff and our contractors put into this effort, and the excellent creative vision of Gray and Gray Advertising and film director and producer, Joe Pytko. But it must be noted that this project

would have never been undertaken if the Media Campaign was not fully committed to providing culturally sensitive, tailored anti-drug messaging.

Recently, the Campaign has been questioned for the level of detail, specificity and labor required to execute it's multicultural component of our Campaign. We have been admonished for catering to what some may deem 'minor' or unimportant segments of population. I contend however, that a federally funded program of the Media Campaign's magnitude must not simply blanket the population with general anti-drug messaging, believing that a "one size fits all" approach will be effective to reach everyone. That strategy goes against social marketing research and advertising industry best practices. Instead, we must make a concerted effort to understand the needs of these small but high-risk communities and develop strategic messages that will resonate with them and educate them. Today's multicultural population is a robust and growing segment of America. It is imperative that we realize this great nation is culturally diverse and recognize the importance of understanding how the values, customs and history that is inherent in one's culture impacts how we send, receive and process information.

The Media Campaign's approach to creating multicultural anti-drug advertising is more than ensuring that the targeted audience sees someone who looks like them in our ads. As we have demonstrated with our American Indian advertising, it is a complex process of identifying the factors that put specific youth at risk for using drugs, the factors that protect them, and the relevant cultural values and then weaving them into a message designed to promote behavioral change. Whenever possible, the Campaign attempts to develop general market advertising that will resonate well with multicultural audiences. This is particularly true when communicating with youth who tend to share a common 'youth culture.' However, communicating with multicultural adults presents a greater challenge because they may have different belief systems and anti-drug parenting needs. Throughout the Campaign, we have conducted research to increase our understanding of our multicultural parents and have learned that they are indeed very different and require different anti-drug communication strategies. Through our research we have also found:

- Unlike general market parents, African American parents are already highly attuned to the fact that their children are at risk for drug use, and that drugs are often readily available in the community. In response, they regularly exercise parenting skills like monitoring, and make an effort to set good examples for their kids. However, because drug use and strong pop cultural influences are a part of their communities, many feel incapable of protecting their children from drug use. We also found that the way in which African American parents raise their children is steeped in their culture and the skills they employ may be different from that of some other ethnic groups.
- Hispanic parents, particularly new immigrants, are very concerned about drugs, but feel they lack specific information about drug use and often times experience difficulty communicating with their more acculturated children. While these parents are aware that there is drug use in their communities, they are not always sensitive to the fact that their own child may be at risk as early as middle school. Through our research, we found that Hispanic parents actually want to obtain more information about drugs and learn more about how to communicate with their children on the subject, since they don't necessarily know how to

approach the topic. They expressed a need for receiving all types of additional information such as the names and descriptions of drugs and how to tell if their child is using, as well as on the dangers of using drugs.

- Asian American/Pacific Islander parents (particularly new immigrants) are largely unaware of the prevalence of drugs in their communities and underestimate the extent to which their kids are exposed. They do not perceive their own kids as being at risk. And as a result of having limited knowledge of drugs in general, not only do they believe their children cannot be affected by drugs, they are not aware of the risks involved in drug use. Out of all of the ethnic groups that the Campaign address, these parents are least likely to perceive the dangers in using illegal drugs. The parents that are least assimilated into American culture are the most in need of anti-drug messages which communicate that their children are at risk for illicit drug use and which educate them on how to take preventive action. Because many of these parents are fairly recent immigrants, anti-drug messages with complex themes should be in their native language.

All of our multicultural communications are important to the Media Campaign and they would be in jeopardy if we are unable to achieve full funding in FY03. Faced with indications that the Media Campaign may receive less than the President's request of \$180 million, we have had to make hard choices in our planning for Campaign continuity in the new fiscal year. Given the central priority to reach the broadest segment of our national youth and parent audiences, reduced funding would very likely force us to sacrifice the Campaign's special communications to the multicultural audiences we have described here, despite the clear need for these efforts.

Conclusion

Our research has provided insights into the realities that multicultural communities have very different needs, all of which cannot be met through one generalized anti-drug message, using one language. Although it is a complex process and requires additional effort, I stand behind our multicultural outreach strategy and believe that it is the best means to ensure that our important message is reaching and being received by all Americans. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at this hearing. I am happy to answer any questions.